



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2144th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 September 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Mezmur

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia (CRC/C/SAU/3-4; CRC/C/SAU/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Saudi Arabia took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia), introducing his country's combined third and fourth periodic reports (CRC/C/SAU/3-4), said that, in Saudi Arabia, the protection and promotion of the rights of the child were based on constitutional principles derived from sharia, national laws and regulations and relevant international instruments, in particular the Convention. Several laws had recently been issued to protect and promote the rights of the child. They included the Child Protection Act, which defined a child as any person aged under 18 years, and the Protection from Abuse Act, which criminalized the failure of a person to ensure that the basic needs of those under his or her custody were met. An integrated system for the protection of the rights of the child had been developed through the construction of a strong legal framework and the establishment of implementation, supervision and control mechanisms.
3. To prevent domestic violence and protect victims, a specialized centre had been established with a free, round-the-clock hotline. The National Family Safety Programme developed plans and strategies to combat domestic violence and child abuse and conducted awareness-raising campaigns. Legislation on the establishment of a family affairs council had recently been adopted with a view to strengthening the status and role of the family in society and ensured family cohesion. It also sought to promote the rights of women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
4. The Human Rights Commission cooperated with relevant departments to monitor the implementation of national legislation and the international instruments to which Saudi Arabia was a party. It received complaints of violations of the rights of the child and performed a supervisory function in the Shura Council. The majority of the objectives that had been set in the framework of the National Plan of Action for Children 2005-2015 had been achieved.
5. Civil society organizations played an important role in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The National Human Rights Association, for example, monitored and received complaints of violations of the rights of the child and issued an annual report and data. Many charities and civil society organizations were involved in protecting and promoting the rights of the child and supported orphans, persons in need, persons with disabilities and victims of violence and human trafficking. Saudi Arabia had 882 civil society organizations working in the spheres of human rights and the rights of the child and, in 2015, they had received financial support from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs valued at more than 2 billion Saudi riyals. In 2015, a law on NGOs had been issued, marking an important shift in the regulation of civil society organizations.
6. Saudi Arabia attached great importance to the development of the judiciary and the revision of national legislation with a view to protecting and promoting human rights. Recent legislative steps in that direction included: the law on judicial decisions, which provided for the establishment of a specialized committee; a draft law on juveniles, which would regulate the treatment of minors during their arrest, investigation, trial and punishment; the law on a committee for lawyers, which supported and strengthened the role of lawyers in the protection of human rights; and an amendment to the law on the Human Rights Commission, which strengthened the independence of that institution.

7. Recent statistics showed the progress made as a result of measures taken to protect and promote the rights of the child. For example, the infant mortality rate had fallen and the school enrolment rate had increased. The King Abdulaziz and His Companions Foundation for Giftedness and Creativity played a key role in developing the capacities of children by sponsoring talented and creative boys and girls and advising government and non-governmental organizations on matters of talent and creativity. In that connection, it had launched a number of initiatives and enrichment programmes.

8. Measures had been taken to further the goal of sustainable development and had already had a positive impact on the protection and promotion of human rights. The Tenth Development Plan 2015-2019, for example, established strategic objectives that were closely aligned with the task of protecting and promoting human rights. Furthermore, work was under way to implement Saudi Vision 2030, which was aimed at developing the country's legal foundations and resources in order to secure a better future. Saudi Vision 2030 would also improve the protection of human rights, including the rights to security, health, education, work, participation in political and public life and freedom of association. To develop the capabilities necessary to achieve the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030, the National Transformation Programme had been established across 24 government bodies and covered several initiatives in the sphere of human rights, including the rights of the child. They included initiatives to develop nurseries and day-care programmes. Targets had also been set to increase the nursery enrolment rate, the participation of children aged between 6 and 18 years in disability programmes and the participation of students in extracurricular activities.

9. A number of programmes and events had been organized in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a further 17 programmes would be launched in 2016, including activities and programmes focused on the Convention. It was expected that a set of national guidelines on the implementation of international instruments would be completed in the following few days. Specialized programmes, seminars and workshops would continue to be held. The Convention had been the subject of a recent seminar attended by a number of United Nations experts.

10. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) asked whether the State party would ratify Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and, if not, why not. As indicated in paragraph 23 of its report (CRC/C/SAU/3-4), the State party had decided to maintain its general reservation to the articles of the Convention that conflicted with the provisions of Islamic law. However, the State party's argument for the maintenance of that reservation, namely that it did not undermine the implementation of the Convention, could be formulated in reverse: if the reservation did not undermine the implementation of the Convention, it served no purpose and could be withdrawn. In practice, the State party's reservation hindered the realization of the rights set forth in the instrument. For example, despite the efforts made by the Ministry of Justice to reduce the prevalence of child marriage, a prominent religious leader had declared that it was permissible under Islamic law for a man to marry a girl aged 9 years.

11. He wondered whether the planned review of domestic legislation relating to children had been conducted and, if so, what its results had been and whether the Child Protection Act covered only the protection of the rights of the child or whether it also covered their promotion. Did it address children's participation, their right to be heard, civil liberties and political rights? If it did not, how were such rights addressed?

12. Furthermore, given the difficulty of determining how much of the budget went towards programmes for children, he wished to know whether there were any plans to improve the system by which budgetary allocations were recorded with a view to ensuring that those made available for programmes for children were sufficient to protect their rights.

including their civil and political rights. Also, it would be helpful to know whether a national data gathering system had been established with the support of United Nations Children's Fund, as had been planned, and, if so, how it would be used in the future.

13. The Committee was concerned at the arrest, detention and punishment of human rights defenders, including those, such as Samar Badawi, who had worked to promote the rights of the child. In that context, he asked what measures had been taken to guarantee the freedom of civil society. Lastly, it would be helpful to learn whether the State party planned to follow the practice of the Gulf Cooperation Council in setting the age of marriage at 18 years, since the exception provided for in article 1 of the Convention could not be used to justify child marriage.

14. **Mr. Gurán** (Country Task Force) said that he would be grateful for more information on the structure, membership and mandate of the National Commission for Childhood and on whether it conducted evaluations and produced an annual report. Furthermore, he wished to know what amendments had been made to bring the National Human Rights Association into line with the Paris Principles, how its chair was appointed, whether it had a department responsible for the rights of the child and how its complaints mechanism worked in practice. Had children in Saudi Arabia been made aware of the complaints mechanism? Lastly, it would be helpful to know whether the principle of the best interests of the child was upheld in administrative and judicial proceedings and whether training courses on the Committee's general comment No. 14 on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration had been organized for professionals who worked with children, including judges, teachers and social workers.

15. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Task Force) asked what strategies and policies had been adopted to combat discrimination against the children of foreign nationals, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teenagers, children with disabilities, children born out of wedlock, the children of migrant workers and children belonging to religious minorities, including the children of Shia families.

16. He asked whether the State party intended to abolish the system of male guardianship over women and girls, as recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and other international bodies, and what steps it had taken to ensure that girls were recognized as full rights holders.

17. Notwithstanding the State party's assertion that there were no religious minorities living in Saudi Arabia, the Committee remained concerned that non-Muslim children were unable to practise their religion or express their culture freely outside the private sphere and that children who belonged to other religious groups or who had no religious affiliation were often obliged to attend schools where only the State religion was taught. The Committee had also been informed that non-Muslims received less compensation than Muslims in court cases. He invited the delegation to describe the measures taken to put an end to those discriminatory practices.

18. In its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/SAU/CO/2), the Committee had urged the State party to abolish the death penalty as a sentence imposed on persons for having committed crimes before the age of 18, he asked what steps had been taken to revoke the decisions authorizing the execution of persons convicted for crimes committed when they were children; to halt the execution of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr, Dawood Hussain al-Marhon and Abdullah Hassan al-Zahr; and to prohibit, by law, the imposition of the death penalty on persons who were under the age of 18 at the time of commission of the offence.

19. Although the State party had indicated that no child had been convicted of apostasy, the Committee remained concerned that the possibility of convicting a child of that offence still existed on account of the punishment prescribed for it not having been repealed. He

asked what steps had been taken to repeal laws and decrees that could violate a child's right to express their views and beliefs freely.

20. It would also be useful to hear about the impact of the regulation adopted in April 2016 to curb the powers of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Lastly, he asked whether the State party had considered exempting girls belonging to other religious groups or who had no religious affiliation from adhering to the dress code imposed on Muslim girls, and whether it had removed all references that were discriminatory towards religious minorities from school textbooks.

21. **Ms. Sandberg** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee had been alarmed by reports that stoning, flogging and amputation, which constituted acts of torture and/or ill-treatment, could still be imposed as a punishment on children; that torture was often used to compel children to confess to crimes that they had not committed; that children who had been sentenced to death were held in solitary confinement; and that children were allowed to attend public executions, which involved beheading and stoning. She asked whether any measures had been adopted to prohibit the imposition of such punishments on persons who had committed a crime before the age of 18, to prevent children from attending public executions and to afford children who were in contact or who had come into conflict with the law better protection against acts of torture and ill-treatment.

22. The Committee had received reports that domestic violence remained widespread in Saudi Arabia. It would be useful to learn more about the impact of the recently adopted laws to address domestic violence, the measures adopted to enforce them, any other programmes being carried out to curb that phenomenon and the interventions of child protection teams. The delegation should also indicate what was being done to address the root causes of violence against children and its links with gender-based violence.

23. As the State party had refuted reports that police officers often requested women and girls to obtain their male guardian's permission before lodging a complaint on the basis that it would be unlawful for them to do so, she asked what measures were in place to ensure that police officers complied with the legal provisions prohibiting that practice. She invited the delegation to comment on reports that judges sometimes prevented women from entering the court room and from testifying at trials.

24. Noting that the use of corporal punishment against children was still permitted in penal institutions and in the home, which constituted a violation of the Convention, she asked whether the use of corporal punishment against children was also permitted in alternative care settings, day-care centres and schools. She asked whether the State party envisaged prohibiting the use of corporal punishment in the home and promoting alternative forms of discipline.

25. She would also like to know how it was ensured that girls who were victims of sexual abuse were not prosecuted for extramarital sexual relations if they denounced their abusers. She invited the delegation to comment on reports that child sex offenders could escape punishment by paying a form of financial compensation to the victim's family known as "blood money"; on the case of Fayhan al-Ghamdi, who had reportedly been released shortly after having been convicted of raping, torturing and murdering his 5-year-old daughter; and on reports that Saudi citizens often engaged in sex tourism abroad, making use of temporary marriages to sexually abuse young girls. Lastly, she asked whether the "1919" helpline was manned 24 hours a day and, if not, whether its hours of operation could be extended.

26. **Ms. Aho Assouma** (Country Task Force) said that, although Saudi Arabia was to be commended on its efforts to encourage the prompt registration of all births in the country and on providing that service free of charge, the Committee was concerned that the fine imposed on parents who failed to obtain a birth certificate for their child within six months of his or

her birth, which could be doubled depending on the length of the delay, could effectively prevent parents with little or no financial resources from ever obtaining a birth certificate for their child. She asked whether there was a special programme in place to register children whose births had never been declared and whether there were cases in which birth certificates were not claimed by a child's parents. Moreover, the requirement for parents to produce their child's original birth certificate in order to enrol him or her in school effectively denied children whose birth had not been registered access to schooling. How did the State party guarantee children in that situation access to education and ensure that the births of children belonging to nomadic tribes or born to migrant workers were registered?

27. The delegation should also indicate what had been done to address the problem of statelessness among children belonging to nomadic tribes and to amend article 7 of the Citizenship Act to allow all Saudi women to transmit their nationality to their children on an equal footing with men and to offset the risk of statelessness arising from it. The Saudi authorities should not hesitate to request technical support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in dealing with the problem of statelessness. It would also be helpful to learn more about the procedures for applying article 7 of the Citizenship Act.

28. On child marriage, she noted with concern that a girl's male guardian continued to exercise complete control over her life and could unilaterally arrange and set the conditions of her marriage. Moreover, the Committee had been alarmed by reports that young girls were sometimes sold as commodities to pay family debts. She asked what measures the State party had adopted to raise the minimum legal age for marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls; to prohibit child marriage outright; to protect married children against domestic violence; and to abolish the system of male guardianship over women and girls. She also wished to know whether child marriages could be annulled if the girl had not yet been handed over to her future husband and how soon a girl who had already gone to live with her new husband could contest the marriage.

29. Noting that a divorce could not take place if the husband withheld his consent and that the wife was required to pay back her dowry if a divorce was granted, she asked whether any move had been made to correct the blatant gender-based inequalities in divorce proceedings. Lastly, she asked whether any action had been taken on the findings of the study on child marriage conducted by a commission of senior scientists referred to in paragraph 72 of the State party's report.

The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.25 p.m.

30. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that, although Saudi Arabia had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, the matter was under constant review. The general reservation to the Convention should be viewed as a confirmation of the constitutional principle of the supremacy of sharia and its primacy over all other laws, including the international treaties ratified by Saudi Arabia.

31. **Ms. Al Saleh** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Government of Saudi Arabia attached great importance to promoting children's welfare and to providing children with adequate care. The National Commission for Childhood had been established by ministerial decree and came under the authority of the Ministry of Education. The National Commission was composed of representatives of several government ministries and childhood specialists and had its own budget. It was responsible for coordinating the activities of all government and private institutions and civil society organizations working in the area of children's welfare. Its mandate was to develop policies, programmes and plans for children alongside the competent government institutions; to make policy recommendations to those institutions; to conduct research on and raise public awareness of children's issues; to draft regulations for

the protection of children from abuse; and to evaluate and report on the implementation of regulations, policies, programmes and plans for children.

32. The National Commission had undertaken studies on children's welfare in the health and education sectors and had developed and carried out appropriate programmes and plans in cooperation with the Family Safety Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), having consulted leading academics, children in alternative care settings and other relevant stakeholders.

33. The National Commission had issued comprehensive national guidelines to assist the competent authorities in dealing with cases of child abuse and in identifying and overcoming the most frequent obstacles to the effective implementation of children's policies. It had also reviewed the performance of the institutions responsible for receiving and investigating complaints of child abuse, and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes and existing child protection legislation and regulations. The review had identified a number of shortcomings and challenges, which the Government was in the process of addressing.

34. The Ministry of Education, in cooperation with UNICEF, had launched a programme to combat bullying in schools and had reviewed and updated existing policies and regulations on bullying. The National Commission had provided teachers from 45 districts with training on how to deal with cases of bullying and conducted activities to raise the awareness of students, parents and the wider community of the phenomenon.

35. The National Commission had also undertaken an initiative to raise the awareness of media professionals of the impact of their work on children and had created a network against childhood neglect to build the capacity of teachers to deal with cases of child abuse that came to light at their school. Teachers and public officials had also received training on how to recognize the tell-tale signs of child abuse.

36. The most significant strategy devised by the National Commission was the National Childhood Strategy, which provided for the development of legislation, policies and programmes to comprehensively address children's needs.

37. The Ministry of Finance, in cooperation with other relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, was responsible for ensuring the proper management of funds allocated to children's affairs. Civil society organizations were also actively involved in monitoring implementation of the Convention in order to identify any shortcomings in that regard, including those caused by a lack of funds. A number of areas targeted for funding since 2014 could be cited by way of example: 280 million Saudi riyals had been allocated to alternative care programmes for children with special needs; 77 million Saudi riyals had been assigned to broadcasters for the production of children's programmes; and 19 million Saudi riyals had been disbursed to families living abroad.

38. Preparations were being made for the establishment of a family council. The council, which would report directly to the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, would include representatives of concerned groups, such as children, women and the elderly, and would be tasked with developing a future family strategy. It would operate in coordination with the competent authorities and would, among other things, encourage community-based participation in both children's and family affairs and develop a database on related matters. Under article 6 of the decree, a technical committee would be set up that would include representatives of the National Commission for Childhood. In its coordination role, the council would undertake a number of activities such as monitoring the media, receiving complaints and raising awareness of the Convention in both formal and informal settings. Currently, various government bodies were implementing a phased programme designed to promote a human rights culture, in accordance with a royal order of 2009. Furthermore, under a Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, a number of seminars and workshops had been held on human rights issues, most recently in August 2016.

39. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that, notwithstanding the State party's position that its reservation to the Convention had no negative consequences, current legislation regarding the age of marriage for girls ran counter to the rights of the child. He would therefore like to know whether the authorities could consider applying relevant laws in such a way that children's rights were not violated. While he had been interested to hear about the steps taken to protect the rights of children, he recalled that the Convention had brought about a paradigm shift, inasmuch as it made children subjects of rights, not objects of protection. Consequently, it would be interesting to know what was being done to promote children's rights and ensure the exercise thereof.

40. **Mr. Alotaibi** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Child Protection Act sought to provide children with comprehensive protection from all forms of abuse and neglect. It defined a child as a person under 18 years of age and neglect as the failure to meet a child's basic needs, including his or her physical, emotional, social, educational and safety needs. In addition, the Act provided detailed descriptions of situations that amounted to neglect, for example the failure to provide a child with identity documents or to complete the child's required vaccinations. The Act also criminalized certain forms of conduct considered to be forms of abuse, such as abusive language, discrimination on racial, social or economic grounds and the employment of children in sporting activities that might jeopardize their safety. The implementing regulations of the Act identified the bodies responsible for investigating cases of abuse and neglect of children and for bringing prosecutions against those responsible. The Act and its implementing regulations had been made available online.

41. **The Chair**, recalling the point raised by Mr. Cardona Llorens concerning children as rights holders, said that it would be helpful to know, for example, whether in cases of neglect children could lodge complaints without parental consent and take part in court proceedings.

42. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that a number of actions were taken to involve children in the enforcement and protection of their rights. For instance, certain media organizations provided children with training on their rights to education and to expression of opinion; furthermore, some school broadcasts and other programmes were prepared by children themselves. Further information concerning the issues raised in that regard by Mr. Cardona Llorens would be provided in writing. Although child marriage was not a widespread phenomenon in Saudi Arabia, marriages involving minors did on occasion take place, in particular in border areas. When apprised of such cases, the relevant authorities took immediate action to protect the rights and interests of the minors concerned.

43. **Mr. Bin Nouh** (Saudi Arabia) said that the Ministry of Justice had issued a number of circulars regarding forced marriages and marriages involving minors, including instructions for those responsible for the registration of marriages. The Ministry had also organized several training courses and seminars in that regard, and plans were in place to establish an expert commission tasked with drafting a code of conduct relating to personal status issues. As to the issue of guardianship between the two sexes, which had been considered by some international organizations to be prejudicial to the rights of women, it did not in fact entail the domination of men over women. Guardianship was a form of custody that included the care of minors; in those cases custody was usually granted to the mother.

44. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** asked whether child marriage was defined only as a marriage between minors or whether it also included marriages between, for example, adult men and girls.

45. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he would appreciate a response to the question that he had raised earlier, which concerned male guardianship of women rather than the custody of children.

46. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that courts were responsible for reviewing marriages involving minors and that judges could exercise their discretionary powers to allow, for example, the marriage of an adult man to a girl aged 16 or 17 if they considered that it was in the best interests of the minor concerned. Marriages involving younger minors were very rare; they were generally annulled when brought to the attention of the courts. Government bodies, including the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education, were taking steps to prevent marriages involving children, including by focusing efforts on enhancing educational opportunities for girls; it was important to note in that regard that there were now more female than male students in higher education.

47. With regard to the question of guardianship, there were certain aspects of sharia that could not be overlooked, in particular the guardianship role of a father when a daughter was entering marriage for the first time, which was undertaken to protect the girl concerned. Such guardianship did not apply to women marrying for the second time.

48. **Mr. Bin Nouh** (Saudi Arabia) said that, in such cases, the purpose of the guardianship system was to ensure that the girl's best interests were being served. However, if the girl concerned objected to a decision, she had the right to take the matter to a court, which would make a ruling in the light of her best interests. The delegation would provide the Committee with further information in writing on marriage-related issues.

49. **Mr. Gurán** asked why the State party had not yet established a legal minimum age of marriage. He could not see any obstacles to doing so, as many other countries that recognized sharia had already established a minimum age of 18 years.

50. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether perhaps there were two different types of guardianship being discussed. In its concluding observations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had referred to *mehrem*, but the delegation had used a different word when discussing the issue. Even if *mehrem* was not legally prescribed, it was widely accepted and severely limited the legal capacity of women and girls.

51. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that Saudi Arabia was a very large country with a wide range of cultural practices and traditions. Girls in villages and agricultural areas typically married at a much younger age than those who lived in cities, due to the very different lifestyle in rural versus urban areas. The issue of the age of marriage was therefore left to the courts to consider on a case-by-case basis. The best interests of the girl must be taken into account before the marriage could be approved by the courts. A large-scale study of the issue was currently under way.

52. **Mr. Bin Nouh** (Saudi Arabia) said that the concept of *mehrem* applied not only to a woman's father or brothers but to any of the woman's close male relatives. Any of them could serve as a chaperon to assist the woman, and she was free to ask any of them to perform those duties.

53. **Mr. Al-Aiban** (Saudi Arabia) said that, irrespective of *mehrem* guardianship, women still had the legal capacity to look after their own affairs. If a woman objected to a proposed marriage authorized by her father, she could submit a request to the courts asking for permission to exercise her freedom.

54. **Mr. Gurán** said that the State party's policies relating to the family included many discriminatory features. For example, a woman must obtain her husband's permission in order to acquire a passport or travel abroad. It was reported that, despite ministerial decrees to the contrary, airport security officers still demanded that women show written proof of

their father's permission for them to travel, making it impossible for female students to study abroad without their fathers' permission. The delegation should clarify that situation.

55. In the event of a divorce, the father was automatically granted legal custody of the children. He asked whether the State party would consider amending that provision to bring it into line with the Convention. He also asked whether any action was taken against abusive male guardians and whether children born out of wedlock enjoyed the same rights as other children. He wished to know the current status of the proposed legal amendment that would make it possible for women to obtain family identification cards.

56. Noting the many different kinds of alternative residential care in the State party, he asked what measures were being taken to transition from institutionalized care to more family-based care for children deprived of their family environment. He requested clarification about how *kafalah* was practised in Saudi Arabia, as it appeared from the State party's report that children sometimes left the *kafalah* system before reaching adulthood. Was it true that children of single mothers were treated as orphans and placed in orphanages?

57. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that, while the Saudi authorities had made many efforts with regard to disability issues, those efforts appeared to follow a paternalistic, protective approach rather than a rights-based approach. Most children with disabilities remained in segregated schools, particularly those with psychosocial disabilities and multiple disabilities. He therefore asked whether the Government was considering adopting a comprehensive policy on inclusive education that would combat stereotypes and prevent discrimination against children with disabilities.

58. In addition, he asked whether the State party was considering ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and he wished to know the number of children asylum seekers and the criteria they must meet to be granted refugee status. He also wished to know the minimum age for domestic labour and whether there were any oversight mechanisms in place to prevent child labour in domestic settings. He asked what measures had been adopted to address the concerns expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women about the persistence of trafficking and the economic and sexual exploitation and ill-treatment of young migrant girls employed as domestic servants.

59. The Committee was deeply concerned about reports that members of the military coalition led by Saudi Arabia were committing serious violations of the rights of children in Yemen by, inter alia, attacking schools and hospitals and using starvation as an instrument of war. There had also been reports of children being recruited by the Yemeni coalition that was supported by Saudi Arabia. He asked what action was being taken to investigate those complaints and to ensure that international humanitarian law was respected.

60. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked what steps were being taken to reduce the high rate of infant mortality in Saudi Arabia. The fact that most health-care professionals were foreigners who did not speak Arabic acted as a barrier that prevented certain population groups, including children, from accessing health care. The delegation should describe its plans to address that problem. She would welcome information on any activities carried out to promote breastfeeding and to implement the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. She asked what the State party was doing to reduce its carbon footprint, given that its high carbon emissions had a negative impact on children's future prospects.

61. Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia was a wealthy country, poverty was also present there. She wished to know whether the entire population was covered by the social security scheme and asked what measures were in place to ensure access to water, food, health care and decent housing for low-income families. She also asked what preconditions families must meet to access the benefits provided by the Takaful Foundation and how many families benefited from the Government's poverty reduction strategies.

62. She would appreciate further information on the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and on any measures to support HIV-positive mothers and children, including in rural areas. She asked whether any support was provided to mothers in prison who were apparently separated from their children. Children in a street situation were often revictimized by being arrested for not possessing identification papers. The delegation should comment on that situation. Were there any programmes to benefit child beggars and street children as a whole?

63. Given that the sexual exploitation and abuse of children was fairly widespread, she asked whether health-care professionals received training on how to detect such abuse and treat the victims and whether a national register of cases of abuse and neglect had been set up within the health-care sector. She also asked why the State party did not publish statistical data with a view to combating the abuse and ill-treatment of children. It would be helpful to know more of programmes to prevent the exploitation of children, such as the trafficking of children into Saudi Arabia to work as camel jockeys and the selling of girls into sexual slavery.

64. **Ms. Sandberg** said that the Saudi authorities had made many efforts in the field of early childhood care and education, but asked what challenges still remained. She requested clarification as to whether education was compulsory. In view of the rapid population growth, she asked whether the construction of new schools was sufficient to keep up with the growing demand for education. She also asked why girls were required to have their fathers' permission to attend school. Noting that women in higher education were only allowed to study a limited number of subjects, she asked how the State party justified that restriction and how it planned to improve the situation. She wished to know whether the Government planned to make physical education mandatory for girls in school.

65. She asked whether, in school textbooks, women were portrayed working in a variety of different fields. The regulation that made it mandatory to teach Sunni Islam religious instruction in both public and private schools was not in line with children's freedom of religion. The delegation should comment on that situation.

66. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked what mechanisms were in place to prevent the torture and ill-treatment of children in conflict with the law at the time of their arrest. He also asked whether those children were able to challenge the legality of their deprivation of liberty before a competent authority. The delegation should comment on the power of the Ministry of Interior to place minors in indefinite detention.

67. He asked what progress had been made towards establishing a better regulatory system that would curb law enforcement and judicial officials' discretionary powers in interpreting and applying the law. He also asked whether any action was being taken to raise the age of criminal responsibility to an internationally acceptable standard and to ensure that all children were provided with qualified legal assistance in any legal proceedings involving them. He was concerned about the fact that children could be released from detention only under the custody of their guardian and that mothers could not exercise guardianship. He asked how the Government ensured that all children were separated from adults in places of detention and that they could remain in contact with their families. Lastly, he asked what steps were being taken to prohibit the handing down of the death penalty to persons who had been under 18 years of age at the time of the offence.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.